

COLOR OF JUSTICE RESOURCE GUIDE

*A Collaboration of District 2 and Monroe College
For Students Pursuing a Legal Career*



MONROE | School of Criminal
COLLEGE | and Social Justice



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I. Introduction

In 2001, The National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ) launched The Color of Justice program (COJ) to encourage young women to consider a career in the legal profession. Since its inception, the COJ has become one of NAWJ's signature programs, receiving nationwide recognition. The program involves career coaching, networking events, panel discussions, and small group discussions, focusing on the law school admissions process, bar admission, and selecting legal careers that align with individual goals.

In 2021, due to in-person event restrictions as a result of the pandemic, District Two, in collaboration with Monroe College - School of Criminal and Social Justice, created a COJ virtual speaker series which took place from February through May 2021. The series included monthly presentations from judges, public and private sector lawyers, law students, and other legal professionals. The virtual program resulted in this Resource Guide which is designed to provide general guidance to individuals contemplating a legal career by offering insight into law school, the LSAT, the benefits of mentorship, the bar exam, and post-graduate networking.

II. Is Law School for You?

Personal Perspective — D. Usyk, FLS '21, 1L Columbia University

Law school can open up many opportunities. When considering law school, applicants should explore the various career options a law degree offers. You are not limited to practicing law as an attorney. A law degree also provides you with the skillset to pursue a career in public service, finance, nonprofit, entrepreneurship, etc. So, if you are considering attending law school, take the leap. You gain valuable experience, meet amazing people, and develop an understanding of the world that is essential in any work environment you choose to pursue after graduation.

Can you afford it?

According to US News Reports, the average cost at private law schools in the 2021 academic year was \$51,268, which was \$9,125 higher than the average out-of-state cost at public law schools. The difference in cost of attending a private versus public law school can be a substantial savings of approximately \$22,200. Law school costs include tuition, room and board, books and supplies, and other needs such as emergency purchases, medical needs, and entertainment.

Law school programs are three years for full-time students or four years for part-time students who are employed. The ABA does not permit full-time students to work more than 20 hours a week. As the stress of studying law requires a full-time commitment, if possible, it is advisable not to work entirely.

Law school is considered an expensive investment. However, the return on your investment can be potentially substantial because a career in the law has a potential for high income earning. The average starting salary for a law school graduate is approximately \$150,000. The salary amount depends on several factors such as the ranking tier of the law school, grades, and whether or not you bring a strong profile (i.e. if you were editor in chief of the law review, moot court association, etc.) Additionally, the salary will depend on whether you choose public or private sector employment. Public sector salaries (such as prosecutors or public defenders) are significantly lower than the private sector salaries (such as attorneys in corporate law practice).

The high cost of legal education should not discourage you from attending law school. There are many sources of funding you can benefit from, including student loans, scholarships, grants, public interest forgiveness programs, and family gifts. It is important to consider that borrowing should be the last resort. If you must borrow, do so after you have exhausted all other grants, scholarships, and family support or employment income, and then only borrow the bare minimum. The less you borrow for your education, the less debt you will carry after graduation. Remember, you may be paying back loans for 20 to 30 years. Scholarships and grants do not have to be paid back, and if a student qualifies, they can cover the cost of tuition or help defray the cost of other expenses like books, room and board, and law school fees. Be frugal with your resources, so you don't have to struggle financially once you enter the job market.

An additional source of financial relief can come from loan forgiveness if graduates enter the public interest sector. Upon graduation, law graduates may utilize the income-based repayment plan offered by Federal Student Aid. Within the income-based repayment plans, there are two general programs that offer debt cancellation based on years of service and years of payments made under the income-based repayment plans. The most commonly known program is the Public Interest Loan Forgiveness program (PSLF) which requires 10 years of service in an approved governmental agency together with 10 years of payments within an income-based repayment plan. After 10 years of service, the borrower may apply for cancellation of their student loan debt. There is a program offered for borrowers in the private sector as well which requires 20 years of service and repayment of student loans over the span of 20 years within an income-based repayment plan. After 20 years of service and payments on student loans within the income-based repayment plan, the borrower may apply for debt cancellation of their student loan debt.

III. Getting Into Law School

The Law School Admission Test (LSAT)

You must take an entrance exam for admission to law school. Most law schools require you to sit for this exam, and most admission offices use the score to compare you to other candidates in the pool. Therefore, how you score on this test will determine if you gain admission to the law school of your choice. This part of the admissions process must be taken seriously and prioritized. You must invest time and money in preparing for this exam to succeed. You should aim for the highest score possible to avoid having to re-take the exam.

Set aside a period of a few months prior to the exam to constantly practice for and prepare. In terms of time, the LSAT is a lengthy test. You must practice sitting down for an extended amount of time as the exam is likely to last a few hours and you will need to practice the types of questions you will encounter. Set aside a monetary amount to pay for a prep course for the LSAT. Some associations and schools may offer free prep courses. However, you should also invest in a prep course if you are able. The preparation will expose you to the types of questions, and the stress you will encounter and will help you narrow down any deficiencies or skill sets you need to improve upon. The actual test should never be considered a practice test. To meet this aim, focus on finding a prep course that is suitable to your needs and works for you.

Some considerations are whether to attend a virtual or face-to-face course and how much the course will cost. Whether to go with the virtual or face-to-face option depends on your learning style. In funding the course, get creative and ask family members to support you by sending you funding for the course instead of graduation and other special occasion gifts.

The initial decision in selecting what course is best for you is figuring out whether you would like an in-person or online experience. The in-person experience is entirely like a classroom experience, where an instructor indicates which section and question types to focus on first. This option allows you to take at least one LSAT practice test under simulated test conditions. On the other hand, the online experience allows you to pick and choose the study path that makes the most sense to you. Teaching videos with explanatory explanations allows you to tailor the entire prep experience to your needs.

Important Tips on LSAT Preparation:

Build habits that will lead to success. Set aside a bit of time every day to practice a number of questions. These practice drills will help you become comfortable sitting and thinking for extended periods of time. Find a place in the home, school, or office where you can study. Scheduled study time for the same day each day. This helps you develop the habit of studying and practicing so it becomes easier to do as time goes by. Make time to do mock tests every weekend leading up to the official test day. Try to simulate the testing conditions to the best of your ability. This means avoiding distractions, interruptions, and procrastination. Sample practice tests are available online and for purchase from bookstores.

Personal Perspective - J. Simpson, 1L Columbia University

For my LSAT exam prep, I primarily used LSATmax ("the prep course"), an app compatible with IOS and Android software accessible on all devices. The app gave me access to 100 practice tests, group tutoring sessions with the option of private sessions, daily drills, and videos that explain how to approach different sections of the LSAT. The prep course also provides an easy to use practice book and videos for each section. I began studying for the LSAT a year in advance. In addition to LSATmax, I played logic games from an app on my phone. These games helped condition me to get through the logic games section on the test. On average, most report that the logic/analytical section of the test is the most difficult. The prep course has different access levels, ranging in price and the number of study materials provided. I also purchased test prep books for additional practice.

In-Person Prep-Class

I took the test twice and took two types of prep courses, one in-person and one online. For my first test, I took the Kaplan in-person prep course. The class provides in-depth teaching on how to select the correct answer based on the question. Kaplan provides an in-class study book, a supplement book of questions and sample tests. In addition, Kaplan provides three sample LSATs to be taken in class. The first class involves a diagnostic practice test. The actual testing environment is simulated. The goal is to establish a benchmark that will be periodically. This diagnostic method allowed me to see where I needed to improve. The in-person class provided me with a strong foundation which I then applied to an online course for my second LSAT.

Online Prep-Class

I used the 7Sage online course to prepare for my second test. The 7Sage program is filled with a 20-year databank of practice tests and questions, providing many opportunities to practice actual LSAT questions. Additionally, 7Sage's online database has sorted questions from each section into question types allowing you to continuously learn and practice the same question type. While there's not as much structure, there are hundreds of lessons about sections and tests that allow you to focus on specific material. This course is beneficial to those who want to focus specifically on a section or question type. This online course also provides practice test opportunities to mimic the electronic LSAT.

Prepping is a very personal decision. Both online and in-person prep courses are beneficial. It is recommended that students seeking a prep course try free trials for online courses such as 7Sage, [7sageprogram](#), LSATEngine, [LSAT Engine](#), Kaplan's online course, [Kaplan Course](#), or [Khan Academy](#).

Law School Application Process

The application process can be lengthy and costly. You will need to set aside some funds to pay for applications. Some law schools waive the application fee if you can establish that you have limited income resources.

The same platform used to register for the LSAT is the same platform used for the law school application process. Visit [LSAC.org](#) to create a free account. It is best to create a profile as early as possible to get familiar with the layout and functions of the website. You can use the resources on this website as early as your freshman and sophomore years and visit to learn more about the resources that are available, scholarships, law school fairs, types of law degrees and programs, and much more regarding your legal career prospects.

Through LSAC and purchasing a Credentials Assembly System ([CAS](#)) for \$45, the website will create your school report by summarizing your transcripts, creating your law school report, processing letters of recommendation, and electronic application processing. The cost of the LSAT is \$200, and if you're a first-time test taker, you will be able to, for an additional \$45, have the option to cancel your test scores and see them early.

Importance of Recommendations

Recommendation letters from those who know you well are an important part of your law school application process. It is important that you waive your right to view your letters of recommendation; this shows the admissions committee that you trust the quality and strength of the letter being submitted on your behalf. Failure to do so reflects that you don't trust your recommender to write a strong letter. Additionally, waiving your right to view the letter gives the recommender the incentive to be truthful and honest in assessing you. This in turn, gives the admissions committee a fair and accurate representation of your true academic ability and allows them to determine if you are an adequate candidate that can meet the rigors of the law school's program.

When asking someone to write a letter of recommendation, think of someone who can write a strong letter, advocating for your admission to the school. If the recommender is alumni of the school you are applying to, ask them to identify themselves as such and ask them to state why they believe you would be a great addition to the alumni list of the school.

Think of relevancy as well. If you took courses in college that were designed to prepare you for law school, look to those instructors first. Instructors who can attest to your analytical, reasoning, and writing skills are the strongest recommenders you can provide. Especially if you need to offset a less than desirable LSAT score or GPA average. The letters of recommendation and personal statements may be a tie-breaker with other students being considered so only ask people you believe will strongly advocate on your behalf. For example, it is smart to keep writing samples from a class you've excelled at and ask that professor for a written recommendation that shows your strong writing skills.

Congratulations! Your Hard Work Paid Off — You Are Accepted to Law School



IV. Successfully Navigating Law School

Time Management In Law School

Personal Perspective - A. Anthony, SUNY at Buffalo, Class of 2021

How efficient you are as a law student will depend upon how effectively you schedule your time. There are twenty-four hours in a day. As a traditional law student at an American Bar Association-accredited law school, a student is typically required to earn approximately twelve to fifteen credit hours each semester. At a minimum, a student can expect to be in class for twelve hours each week.

A first-year law student may quickly realize that there are not enough hours in a day to prepare for class, commute, study, and engage in extracurricular activities. Success depends on a structure, a schedule, and a plan. There are days when you may need to do all-night study sessions or days when everything you set out to do simply cannot get done within twenty-four hours. However, if you understand the importance of scheduling, you can:

1. Accomplish more in less time;
2. Remain on top of your assignments and extracurricular activities;
3. Create boundaries;
4. Lower the risks of suffering burnouts during the semester, especially at critical moments like your examination periods; and
5. Be in a better position to maintain a well-balanced law school/social life.

Finding Balance-Juggling Family, Work, Extracurricular Activities

The key to finding balance as a law student is to develop a schedule by:

1. Investing in a planner (electronic or paper);
2. Utilizing technology and social media as a tool to your advantage; and
3. Creating weekly and daily To-Do lists to monitor your productivity.

Realistic Goal Setting

It is important to set realistic goals and practical expectations of yourself. Avoid creating schedules that only focus on achieving academic goals. The key to juggling family, work, and extracurricular activities during law school is to acknowledge that they exist and ensure that your planner has a reasonable balance for each area of your life. Invest in a planner, whether paper or electronic. A paper planner can be as simple as getting a dated notebook or one that is pre-set with date and time slots that you can easily fill in.

Today, technology makes it easy to keep track of all events and appointments. Voice command on a smartphone can be your personal assistant. Google assistant can also set up appointments for you fairly easy, and allows you to set up reminders so you don't miss important events and assignments.

Self-Care

As a law student, it is easy to slip into the habit of putting everything else in your life on the ‘back burner’ to ensure you remain focused on achieving good grades. We certainly love a couple of glowing A’s on our transcript! However, when these grades come at the expense of your health, you risk being placed in a position where you may not be able to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Self-care includes maintaining your physical, emotional, mental, social, and financial health. Although it may be easy to minimize the importance of self-care when your goal is to graduate in the top ten percentile of your class, it is also important to note that when you invest in your well-being, you are in a better position to achieve your academic goals without losing who you are along the way.

Never forget to show yourself grace.

V. Enhancing the Law School Experience

Relationship Building - Joining Clubs and Other Associations in Law School

Building relationships and networks once in law school will enable you to develop interest-centered affiliations and can be a valuable resource while pursuing a legal career.

There are a variety of organizations to join once in law school. Consider joining an affinity group representing a common interest or volunteering to write or take pictures for the school’s newspaper or blog. Find those extracurricular activities that make you happy. Don’t just join an activity because you see everyone doing the same thing. Remember your time is limited and valuable, so you have to choose meaningful activities to get the most out of your extracurricular involvement.

The Moot Court Association is another opportunity for building relationships and developing the skill and art of oral advocacy and legal writing. Moot Court Association involvement offers opportunities to meet attorneys, judges, and others in the legal field who participate in moot court competitions and can be a source of mentorship.

The following is a list of law student associations you may consider joining:

Resource	Website
National Black Law Students Association	https://www.nblsa.org Email: LSACinfo@LSAC.org Phone: 215.968.1001
American Constitution Society	https://www.acslaw.org
National Latina/o Law Student Association	https://www.nllsa.org
Asian Law Students Association (international organization)	https://alsainternational.org
Hispanic National	https://hnba.com



VI. The Importance of Having a Mentor

A mentor is defined as an experienced and trusted adviser. When looking for a mentor, it is preferable to find someone who has experience in what you seek to accomplish. You will save time, energy, and even money if you start your journey toward your goals with a mentor who has been there and has gone through the process and achieved the same goal you have set for yourself. This means you can have several mentors from different stages of your legal education and career. So, if your immediate goal is to attend law school, the most natural thing to do would be to speak to someone who has recently attended law school. Are you about to finish college and are considering law school? You would likely reach out to someone in law school or a recent law graduate and ask them what their experience was like. Are you a second-year law student aspiring to become a prosecutor? You would likely reach out to a professional bar association and see if they can connect you with someone who is a prosecutor. Hopefully, they can match you to someone that has a similar background to yours so it's easier to get to know each other. If you are aspiring to enter into corporate or private firm work, the same bar association could provide you with a mentor that is also in private sector work.

A mentor should be an encouraging force in your life, not someone who is going to put a negative spin on everything you discuss. They must also be objective and let you make your own choices. Some people are lucky and identify a lifelong mentor early in their legal journey. Some find their mentor in other ways.

Personal Perspective — A. Anthony, SUNY at Buffalo, Class of 2021

When I moved to the United States to pursue a law degree, I did so with an awareness that international students are underrepresented in law schools and law firms across the nation. However, I was oblivious to the many obstacles I would have to face, in addition to being both black and female in the legal profession.

According to the American Bar Association's Law School enrollment data, foreign female students were only 682 out of 20,690 of the total enrolled as first-year students. As an international law student, I was part of a growing minority group within the U.S. Therefore, it was important to seek the guidance of a mentor who was female, black, and of course, could understand and empathize with the restrictions attached to my status. During my second year of law school, I discovered an amazing opportunity to become a summer judicial intern at the Kings County Supreme Court, Civil Term. This internship was under the guidance of the Honorable Judge Kathy King, which my pre-interview research revealed, was a person of Caribbean heritage. I was excited to apply for a job under the guidance of a successful black female, who although raised in the United States, had immigrant parents from Montserrat, West Indies.

To no surprise, Judge King welcomed me into her chambers with open arms. She provided me with the invaluable opportunity of working under her direction and provided professional, emotional, and mental support throughout my law school career. As a "baby lawyer," she continues to guide me on professional etiquette and career strategy. Accept this testimonial as proof that a professional relationship with someone who is invested in your success will do no harm to you. Be authentic, intentional, and diligent, and that relationship will find you, no matter what area of law you choose to pursue.

VII. Internships

Another way to enhance your law school experience is to seek internships while you are in law school. The career office at your law school provides resources and opportunities for internships and employment. There are plenty of opportunities for industrious students to find a placement in public service, nonprofits, and the private sector while in law school. Some placements are paid, while most are not. This will allow you to build some relationships that can result in professional references when applying for positions and could even become opportunities for permanent employment. Many lawyers have begun their career at a firm or governmental agency, district attorney, or other as summer office interns. Even though most internships are unpaid, know that post-law school graduates applying to jobs are differentiated among the pack of applicants by their legal experiences, paid or unpaid. Your choices for internships in law school will provide a gauge to future employers regarding your interest in a chosen practice area.

How to Obtain Internships

Obtaining hands-on experience through internships is critical to your professional development. Generally, students who rank at the top of their class have access to on-campus interviews for summer associate positions in BigLaw, prestigious public service internships, or Judicial Clerkships. Here are some tips for obtaining an internship.

1. Plan Ahead:

- ▶ Visit your law school's career office and get acquainted with the staff
- ▶ Consider what area of law you want to pursue, and begin your research on firms/organizations that will offer that opportunity
- ▶ Attend resume, cover letter, and interviewing workshops
- ▶ Monitor job postings periodically and set application deadline dates on your calendar/planner
- ▶ Apply to as many internship positions as possible.

2. Network:

- ▶ Seek out individuals who practice in the area of law you wish to pursue
- ▶ Make your passions known
- ▶ Develop mentorship relationships

3. Research/Preparation

- ▶ Carefully prepare application materials
- ▶ Update your resume during your first semester, and ensure that it is approved by your school's career office or a trusted mentor
- ▶ Draft specific cover letters instead of generic ones
- ▶ Ask your law school's career office to review your materials for meaningful feedback

4. Prepare for Interviews:

- ▶ Prior to any interview, thoroughly research the firm/organization, its clients, the practice areas, and the lawyers with whom you will be meeting
- ▶ Prepare to give on-the-spot intelligent responses to questions



- ▶ Acknowledge that it is natural to be nervous, but be confident that you have prepared and are more than capable of obtaining the job of your dreams
- ▶ Prepare thoughtful questions to ask your interviewer during the interview
- ▶ Follow-up after interviews by sending a thank you letter to your interviewer

As you can see, the real-life struggle of securing law school internships and post-graduate employment is no walk in the park. It requires preparation, dedication, and hard work. Most importantly, it requires time, effort, and dealing gracefully with rejection. Remember that the right doors will never be closed for you - do not give up.

VIII. After Graduation

Preparing for The Bar Exam

There is no straightforward formula to preparing for the bar exam. As you may have experienced in law school, everyone has a unique way of studying and preparing for assignments. Here are some generally helpful tips that will maximize your performance on the bar exam:

1. Invest in a bar prep course — this may be the most critical preparation step for the bar exam. A good way to determine which bar prep course will work best for you is by taking advantage of free bar review courses offered while in law school, including the MPRE course. Taking advantage of this will give you the sense of each company’s teaching style, and whether or not they fit your learning style.
2. Identify your strengths and master them.
3. Identify your weaknesses and work on improving them.
4. Be disciplined and stick to your course schedule.
5. Get adequate rest.
6. Practice healthy eating and exercise.
7. Take mental breaks when needed.
8. Avoid reading blogs or posts that trigger anxiety.
9. Trust in God.
10. Trust in Yourself.

Sidebar: One way to get a bar prep course at a very low cost, or possibly for free, is to volunteer to be a bar prep representative at your law school. Do not sleep on this opportunity if it’s available! You won’t regret it.

Admission to the Bar

Upon graduation from law school and after passing the Bar Exam, an application to the state bar of law examiners is required, where you will have to establish your fitness and character to practice law. The vetting process is rigorous. You must be prepared to explain any blemish on your record, including arrests, disciplinary actions, and compliance with federal and state taxes. Anything that can call into question your moral fitness is something that the bar examiners may scrutinize. It’s essential to be honest and not omit anything you are embarrassed to admit. If you fail to disclose the requested information, you may be deemed to lack integrity and credibility, which may result in the denial of your application.

Once becoming a “member” of the bar, you adhere to a high standard of professional conduct governed by the code of professional responsibility and ethical cannons to ensure the public trust.

Membership in voluntary bar associations is different in that a member does not have to submit to such a rigorous vetting process but rather may pay a fee and fill out an application indicating whether they hold a legal position or are interested in being a student member or other type of member.

Building Relationships Post Law School

Importance of Bar Associations

Newly admitted attorneys should join a bar association as early as possible. Many associations offer discounted memberships to newly admitted lawyers and to law students. The following is a list of bar associations. Starting your networking journey early in your professional life will put you in places where you can meet other professionals who will mentor you toward a successful path. We encourage you to research all the associations listed and see which ones speak to you and your future professional goals.

Tip: Sign up for the bar associations that you believe reflect your identity or something you are passionate about. For example, if you are of Caribbean descent sign up for emails from the Caribbean Bar Association. If you are a member of the LGBTQ+ community, you might be interested in joining any of the LGBTQIA+ focused bar associations. If you are passionate about women’s equality, sign up for emails from any of the Women’s Bar Associations. Find a common interest and join committees that are working on issues that impact your community.

Bar Association	Website
New York City Bar Association	https://www.nycbar.org
Metropolitan Black Bar Association	https://mbbanyc.org
New York State Bar Association	https://nysba.org
Puerto Rican Bar Association	http://prbany.com
Dominican Bar Association	https://www.dominicanbarassociation.org
Asian Bar Association	https://www.aabany.org
New York County Lawyers Association	https://www.nycla.org
Caribbean	https://caribbeanbar.org
National LGBT Bar	http://prbany.com
New Jersey Bar Association	https://tcms.njsba.com/PersonifyEbusiness/default.aspx
American Bar Association	https://www.americanbar.org
Hispanic Bar Association	https://hnba.com
National Bar Association	https://www.nationalbar.org
Other useful websites	
List of State Bar Associations (Nationwide)	https://www.lawyerlegion.com/associations/state-bar



IX. Acknowledgements

This resource guide would not be possible without the effort and commitment of the New York legal community, including members of the bench, bar, law professors, students, and legal administrators, all of whom were motivated by a desire to share their knowledge to inspire the next generation of lawyers.

Special Thanks to the Color of Justice Committee,

- ▶ Dean Guylaine Harrison, Esq. and Hon. Kathy J. King, *Co-Chairs*
- ▶ Hon. Doris Gonzalez
- ▶ Yadhira Gonzalez-Taylor, Esq.
- ▶ Hon. Lumarie Maldonado-Cruz
- ▶ Stacey Marques, Esq.
- ▶ Jody McCalla, Esq.
- ▶ Faye Roberts-Paul
- ▶ Hon. Baahati Pitt
- ▶ Hon. Lourdes Ventura

Special Recognition to the Color of Justice Committee Members,

- ▶ Justice Lourdes Ventura and Attorney Yadhira Gonzalez-Taylor,
For having the vision to put pen to paper to create this informative guide

Sincere Appreciation to Nylah Anderson, Aldiama Anthony, Esq., Cyerra Fernandes, Jonte Simpson, and Dmytro Usyk, Esq. for their editorial assistance and for sharing their personal stories about their interest in the law and their path to law school.